

Three Tree Columns



An installation on the campus of York University

October 1989

SPRING HURLBUT

# bark better than bite

by Anna Spalvieri

In a pine grove near Stedman Lecture Halls there exists a sculpture, *Three Tree Columns*, that can be easily overlooked. The sculptress, Spring Hurlbut, chose the site to allow her artwork to integrate with nature. She has succeeded.

Standing in the setting are three 14-foot ash trees designed not only to blend in with their natural setting, but also to visualize the origins of architecture. Hurlbut's work dates back to the Greeks, whose columns were used for support and were also exhibited as a strong sign of stability. The Greeks not only used stone for the columns, but actual trees as well; thus the relationship between nature and architecture Hurlbut expresses within her own work is revealed.

The three trees may only appear to be logs set in spun-steel Doric bases and capitals, but the sculpture is more complex than that. One sculptor, Michael Davy, explains the complexity and highly stylized architectural knowledge behind the work. He says a critical point in the history of architecture occurs during the construction of the column when the vertical meets the horizontal.

This feature is "an important juncture point that she uses in her work, showing the origin of the capital from nature growing up and exploding with a cultural climax on top."

Hurlbut was inspired by Donato Bramante's tree columns in a courtyard at St. Ambrogio in Milan. Bramante's marble columns were made to resemble trees.

Upon arriving in Canada, Hurlbut felt she should "literalize what Bramante had done and actually use real trees." She interprets her own work as imposing "an architectural order on nature and on some level to magnify the grandeur of nature by limiting it within an architectural context." It is Hurlbut's intention the *Three Tree Columns* emphasize the natural part of the tree.

This sculpture may seem rather simplistic on its outside appearance, but it is not, for it stands as a reminder that society has chosen to destroy the natural environment. Nature has been forced to give way to industrialization and overdevelopment. Hurlbut wishes society would discontinue the destruction of nature and learn from the Greeks and Romans how to build with the landscape rather than against it.

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"Too cool." (HS, asst. editor)  
 "Beyond cool." (SV, news editor)  
 "Kicked ass." (PJ, sports personality)  
 "But no 'Rubber Duckie.'" (NP, editor)

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## journal exposes theatre york

by Tania Hewett

Unbeknownst to many in the York community, the theatre department is celebrating its 20th anniversary. This important turning point is commemorated with a special issue of the York Theatre Journal that documents the history of the department from its inception to the present.

According to Professor Don Rubin, the faculty advisor for this issue, the reason for looking back into the past is that "the theatre department has a lot to be proud of. A list of accomplishments many people don't know about which needs to be heard. Most fine arts departments don't have the money to keep comprehensive records of their productions and York is no exception." Rubin also believes the department "can go further if we understand the past. Knowing the past helps you live better and work better."

For those of us who know very little about the development, the *Journal* is a wealth of information. A lot of ground is covered, starting with the department's humble beginnings off-campus as a drama club to its creation and evolution into what the department is now. Rubin, past chair of the fine arts department and one of the first

faculty members of the theatre department, says its main objectives were to provide "serious professional theatre training within a university context. We wanted to be judged by the number of people working in the profession."

It is clear from the *Journal's* interviews with York graduates who went into the profession or related fields that the department has achieved its goals. They revealed what it was like to be a student in fine arts and how the training received either served as a springboard into the theatre world or other related pursuits.

One poignant article was an interview with two York students (one an ex-graduate, the other a first year student) who compared notes about life in the theatre department, the problems in the programme and the difficulties of student life. It is also through their words that we read how the programme has changed.

Another great source of information about the development of the department through the interviews with past chairs who commented on the changes that occurred during their terms. Interviews of both graduates and faculty give the reader a more intimate view of the evolution of the department.

One production Rubin feels

fully represents the theatre department is *The Sand* (directed by Marion Andre who was the director of Theatre Plus) because it is a "Canadian work, Canadian production, and the coming together of professional and students." This, according to Rubin, is one of the goals the department has set out to accomplish. It is no coincidence a photo from the production is found on the cover of the *Journal*.

When looking at the careful documentation of the *Journal*, it is clear the theatre department has given the York community a wide variety of work it may not have had the chance to see elsewhere. Unfortunately, as Rubin says, "The size of the productions have decreased over the years because of the lack of financing and educational budget cuts."

It seems the lack of money has been a constant problem plaguing the department, along with the lack of space and a changing curriculum. But despite the problems, it has managed to survive and thrive.

Rubin hopes that by looking back, students will feel a sense of pride about York, and about their accomplishments in theatre. From looking through these pages, it is clear York's theatre department has a lot to be proud of.

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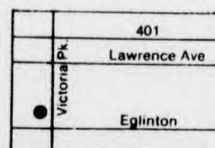
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